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“The Greek refugees in Eastern Europe, 1945 - 1989”

«Greek political refugees in Eastern Europe, 1945-1989»¹

After the end of the greek Civil War (1946-1949), a considerable number of greek refugees appeared in «*eastern countries*» (especially in the second half of 1949 and 1950) when the retreat of the fighters of the defeated «*Democratic Greek Army*» (DGA) followed the rural population of the border regions who sought shelter in friendly to the DGA's struggle countries, asking for political shelter.

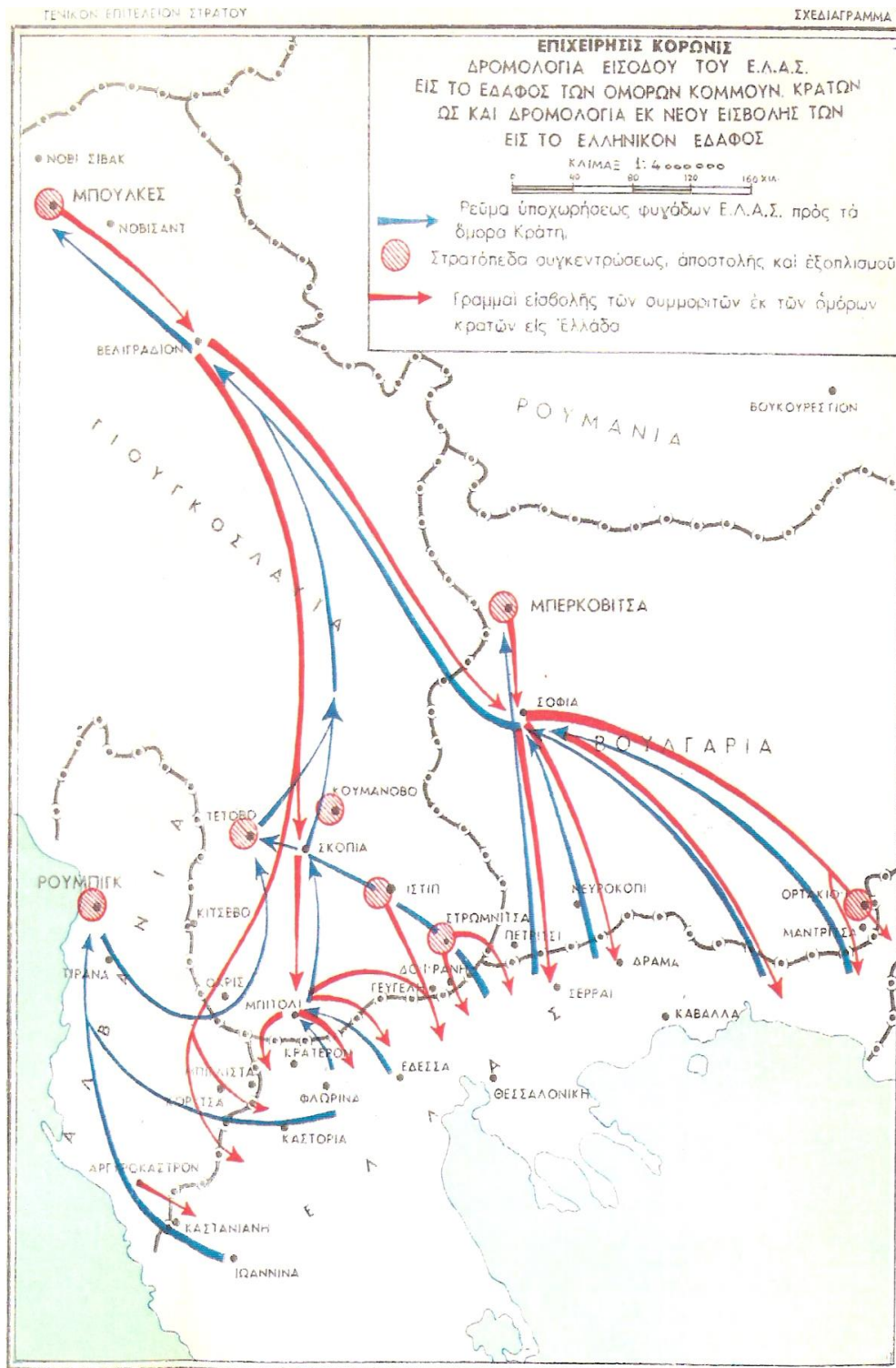


However the escape of the Greek civilians to the allies of the DGA was not an unexpected sudden fact, dragged out of the result of the greek Civil war at the end of August 1949. To this evolution contributed former habits and practices which had already formed a peculiar situation of a «*political immigration*» since immigration of the greek population had started much earlier in the 40's decade.

And (this evolution) was the result of the strategy, which had been followed during all the previous years by the leadership of the Communist Party of Greek (CGP) in order to create a dynamic reserve in the friendly communist countries with the purpose of military and political action. In the years 1945-1946 thousands of Greek communist party cadres of the CGP, together with their families were moved abroad, to the protected from prosecutions against them and at the same time to create a nursery for political and military cadres of the CGP in order to seize the power. And in this way in 1946 the situation was fixed for the party cadres, the captains and the fighters of the «*Greek People's Liberation Army*» (ΕΛΑΣ) who had gathered in the «*refugee centers*» (map1) in Rubic Albania, in Bergovitsa Bulgaria and mainly in Bulkes Yugoslavia, which has converted into a crowded, autonomous, self-governed Greek community.

¹ Based on the book of the same author: Katerina Tsekou, *Greek political refugees in Eastern Europe, 1949-1989*, Alexandria publications, April 2013.

Map1: The organized «refugee centers» in Rubic Albania, Bulkes Yugoslavia and Bergovitsa Bulgaria and the «routes» from Greece to the three border countries, Albania, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, and vice versa, according to the General Army Headquarters/Department of History.



Then during the Civil War 1946-1949 the leadership of the DGA followed a similar strategy. To be more specific: they facilitated the crossing of the border of the wounded or sick combatants and non combatants and they aimed at and achieved to create military, settlement, nursing and recovery camps in the communist countries bordering Greece predicting a more permanent residence for them.

The crossing of the border became more massive and with more organized conditions in 1948, the critical year for the Greek Civil War, when the cleansing operations of the rival «*National Army*» created unsolvable problems to civilians and fighters of the DGA. Civilians from the border villages, were forced either to resort to cities as «*partisan stricken*» or to cross the border. At the same time fighters of the DGA wounded and sick were moved to «*friendly countries*» for nursing and recovering. And after the beginning of 1948 the removal of children was a part of the military operations, with their removal from the scenes of war «*mass kidnapping of children*» and their transfer to the «*People's Republics*» to stay and be raised (table 1).

Table 1:

Up to 1949 the number of «*children refugees*» in «*eastern countries*» apart from Yugoslavia.

	COUNTRY	CHILDREN
1	Hungary	2.500
2	Poland	3.500
3	Romania	5.600
4	Czechoslovakia	3.600
5	Eastern Germany	1.300
6	Soviet Union	300
	Total	16.800

Note:

After 1951 a great removal of children from country to country was noticed, in order to meet with their parents.

(Based on the statistical data of the Working Group of the Greek National Association of Mechanics Greek Repatriated Refugees (ΠΑ.ΣΥ.Μ.Ε.Π.Π.) : The repatriated mechanics political refugees back in their homeland. Reality and perspective, Athens 20/12/1984, in Katerina Chrys. Soutania, *Greek political refugees*, “ella” publications, Larissa 2001, page 33).

The main reasons for the removal of the children from Greece were their salvation from the dangers of the war, starvation and unhealthiness (table 2),

Table 2:
Morbidity of children, who were moved from Greece to the «People's Republics».

Lung diseases	26%
Bronchitis	17,5%
Nerve diseases	10,5%
Scabies	14%
Rheumatism and other diseases	21,5%
Healthy	10,5%

(Based on the data of: Thanasis Mitsopoulos, *Remained Greek. The schools of the Greek political refugees in the socialistic countries*, Odysseus publications, Athens 1979).

but also the «*brutality of the monarch-fascism*» which was manifested with the gathering of the children from the border regions at war and the creation of «*children's towns*». At the end of 1948 and the beginning of 1949, when the problem of reserve became very acute, they decided the military preparation of the teenagers and their mission, as fighters of the DGA to Greece (table 1).

With the end of the war the main part of the DGA escaped crossing the mountain Grammos to Albania, while the fighters of DGA from western and central Macedonia and Thrace moved towards the north, to Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. During the next months, September and October 1949, detached partisans or civilians were crossing the northern borders of the country, seeking shelter.



The decision of the soviet government for the removal of the Greek fugitives from Albania and Yugoslavia and the transfer of a number of them from Bulgaria, followed the sorting of the fugitives and the

organization of missions to other «*People's Republics*» and the Soviet Union, without though taking into account any relational or geographical links (map 2).

Map 2: The «*refugee land*» of the Greek Communist Party after 1949.



Especially for their removal from Albania, were used cargo merchants ships, soviet (e.g. Vladivostok, Eryhona), polish (e.g. Bitsulski, Kostsiouso) and Romanian (e.g. Transylvania). The sea voyages were definitely long (11-12 days) and tiring since their route was: a) through the Aegean sea to the Black sea with final destination the Soviet Union, and b) through the Gibraltar to the Baltic sea with final destination Poland and through Poland to the «*People's Republics*» of Romania, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. Sometimes they were dangerous voyages, because, as the ships did not announce their cargo and they

didn't answer to messages, they were followed by planes (mainly English) in order to ascertain their cargo and their destination.



The «*eastern countries*» welcomed the expatriates, because the element of their state ideology and strategy was the international solidarity (anyway they helped the DGA/GCP in his struggle) and because they had big labor demands (the 2nd world war had vanished their youth). Thus in the Soviet Union and the other «*People's Republics*» of eastern and central Europe appeared the «*refugee land*» of GCP (until 1949 only in Bulkes).

In a huge area (map 2) were found Greek refugees of all ages (from children to old people) with experiences of a different geographical and social environment (islanders, lowland residents, mountain people) with a different state of education (illiterate, primary school graduates, high school graduates or University graduates) with a different mother tongue (greek, slavomacedonian, pondiaka, turkish, vlahika, arvanitika), former fighters of DGA, former prisoners or exiles, conscripted prisoners of war etc who had to cohabit necessarily and also cohabit in regions which hadn't been chosen by them and were very different from theirs.

According to the first results (report/recommendation B.Bartziotas) in the third Conference of GCP, in October 1950, by the end of the Civil war were found almost 60.000 refugees (table 3) in the Soviet Union and the «*People's Republics*» (apart from Yugoslavia).

Table 3:**The Greek political refugees in the «People's Republics» in 1950.**

COUNTRY	Fighters	Children	Organizations grassroots party organization	Members of GCP	Probationary party members of GCP	Total
Romania	9.100	5.132	19	1.208	71	1.279
Czecho - slovakia	11.941	4.148	42	1.637	70	1.707
Poland	11.458	3.590	24	2.937	195	3.132
Hungary	7.253	2.589	15	902	115	1.017
Bulgaria	3.021	672	32	1.026	114	1.140
Eastern Germany	1.128	1.128				
Soviet Union	11.980		61	7.644	529	8.173
TOTAL	55.881	17.259	193	15.354	1.094	16.448

(Based on statistical data of the Central Committee of GCP in 1950. From: Stelios Giatroudakis, *Tashkent. 30 years refugees*, Diogenis publications, page 22).

However, according to other sources, the real number of the refugees is underestimated in this account, which number according to these sources comes to 130.000, from which 25.000 is estimated to have been the fighters of the DGA and 15.000 the political cadres. The rest were civilians of border, mainly, regions and «*children refugees*».



This large category of Greek refugees, which was found under various communist regimes for more than 30 years is met in the greek bibliography with the term «*political refugees*» although the term «*political refugees*» is not identified officially. And furthermore the refugees of this category were never recognized as refugees by the UNO, the Greek State or by their host countries. It is an artificial term which covers only one category of refugees of a specific country, Greece, for a specific period of time. This doesn't mean however that it doesn't claim elements of the broader status of the «*refugee*». And it doesn't either mean that all the people that left Greece as «*political refugees*» were all without exception members of the GCP (even a great number of the

fighters were just fighters of the DGA and not registered members of the party) (table 3).



With the distribution of the refugees from Greece (table 4), the **Soviet Union** received the most (about 12.000) and it was the only country which received fighters of the DGA under military discipline. Although the reasons for moving the combatant refugee populations away from the non-combatant are still unknown, the need for reduction of tension in the Balkans with the removal of the greek partisans from the region might have played a role. In Tashkent (capital of Uzbekistan) which was chosen by the Soviets as a settlement area for greek political refugees, grievous events took place in 1995, as captains and military officials of the DGA were urging accountability for the defeat on the political echelons and they accepted more directly the influence from the political changes in the «metropolis» of the socialistic countries.

Table 4:

The total number of the greek refugees in 1950, according to nationality and settlement country, apart from Yugoslavia.

Greek Communist Party (GCP)				Slavomacedonian sources		
Country	Refugees	Slavomacedonians	%	Refugees	Slavomacedonians	%
Romania	9.100	4.000	40			
Czechoslovakia	11.941	3.800	32	13.000	6.000	46
Poland	11.458	5.479	47	12.000	7.000	58
Hungary	7.253	3.299	45			
USSR	11.980	2.954	24			
East.Germany	1.128	-	0			
Bulgaria	3.071	380	12			
Total	55.881	19.912	35			

(Based on the data of: Riki Van Boeschoten, «Unity and Brotherhood: Slavomacedonians and Greek political refugees in Eastern Europe», *The gun beside the foot. The political refugees of the greek civil war in Eastern Europe*, University of Macedonia publications, page 45).

A great number of refugees (about 12.000) were accepted by **Czechoslovakia** and **Poland** because these countries had industrialized economies and regions recently (in 1945) abandoned from their German population. **Romania**, in which about 9.000 refugees settled down became the base of the leadership of GCP and its central and cultural parts, with Bucharest becoming the informal capital of the «*refugee land*» and being characterized as the «*mind*» of the political refugees. Moreover, only in Romania, after the splitting of the GCP, two «*unions*» of political refugees were functioning. In **Hungary**, where more than 7.000 refugees existed, appeared the particularity of a pure greek settlement, the village of the Greeks or «*Nikos Beloyannis*» (so it was called on 3 April 1952, some days after the execution of this leading member of the GCP in Athens). **Bulgaria** accepted about 7.000 refugees in the big urban and industrial centers mainly from eastern Macedonia and Thrace (mainly from the county of Evros) and a few Pomak refugees (Muslims), whereas in Yugoslavia settled, giving in to its tempting propaganda, mainly slav-speaking refugees from Macedonia. The fewer refugees were accepted by «*German People's Republic*», in the beginning (until November 1949, when the state is established) only «*children refugees*», later intellectuals and party services, and very few were accepted in **Albania**. We lack reliable data about the refugees who remained in Albania and Yugoslavia. Among the refugees was a considerable number of war prisoners of the DGA, who remained in the «*people's countries*» under conditions of tracking and control until the middle 50's.



High mobility of expatriates was observed in the period 1950-1954 with a view to their family reunion (cause for the emerging numerical deviations per country in available historical sources) but removals arose later too. As the history of the Greek refugees was connected inextricably with the history of the socialistic countries, the events in Tashkent in 1955, the events in 1956 in Hungary, the invasion of the Soviets in Czechoslovakia in 1968, the dissolution of the romance of Romania with the Soviet Union had their impact to the settled in these countries greek political refugees and caused new territorial dispersion (this time in the internal of the «*refugee land*»).

Thus, for the history of the Greek political refugees the «*forced hyperoria*», as it was called by the GCP, three periods are proposed (table 5).

Table 5:

Time periods of the history of Greek political refugees:

- 1) **1945-1948**, the period of optimism
- 2) **1948-1957**, the period of massive movement with two subperiods:
 - a. **1948-1955**, arrival of missions of refugees, internal crisis of the GCP
 - b. **1955-1957**, war among parts in the internal of the GCP, dispersion of the refugees in the Eastern Countries.
- 3) **1957-1974**, the period of stabilization of the refugee

In this context and despite the defeat, the losses in human and material resources, the uprooting of thousands of people, the various problems (political, ideological, support, armor, feeding) the exile leadership of GCP, in the beginning, looked to regroup its forces for a «*third round*» of claiming the power, and that's why they tried to keep the partisan groups in Greece and organized training camps for communist refugees in the countries where they were settled. The party realized soon that they had to abandon the slogan «*with the guns beside the foot*» and had to concentrate on «*massive political and financial fight*» according to their party rhetoric.

On their side the «*subjects of history*», that is the Greek expatriates together with the leadership of GCP, considered their removal from Greece temporary.

Gradually they realized that their stay in the socialist countries wouldn't be without problems and the return to their home country wouldn't be soon. They were considered as a foreign body in the countries they had accepted them even when they were registered as «*political refugees*» to them. Thus, without nationality, political rights and military service obligation, but with a right to employment and education, they were forced to adjust to new cultural, social, labor (even climatological) environments, managing the sorrow and bitterness from the defeat and their personal drama, the uncertainty from their status as refugees and also their growing, as time passed, homesickness.



The Greek political refugees, under the special regime of watching, control and policing from the GCP and from each country's Communist Party, incorporated into the structures of the host countries formed «*communities*» and combined their destinies with the native population. In each «*refugee community*» there were different internal party processes, related to the regime and the political developments in each «*people's country*».

The Greek refugees, despite their heterogeneous political synthesis, accepted the «*socialist paternalism*» of the communist parties of the countries in which they finally settled down. From the offer of the necessary (food, home, clothing, care) to the offer of the necessary prerequisite (labor, education, scientific specialization) for their social integration, adjustment and development. Because by the leaderships of the communist parties policies were followed for their integration and adjustment, which served the communist movement in the long and short term. In the short term, with the participation of the Greek refugees in the «*building of the socialistic society*» in their settlement countries and in the long term with their transformation into «*ideological-political arsenal cadres*» and satisfactory scientific and working dynamic for the building of the greek «*socialistic community*» according to the «*eastern countries*» in the distant future.



In all the «*eastern countries*» the working Greek refugees exceeded the 50% of the refugees (table 6), a percentage especially high, if it taken into account the fact that from the 70's and on, the political refugees entered a «*period of senility with a large number of death rate*».

Table 6:

The situation of the «*refugee community*» on 10/1/1975.

COUNTRY	EMPLOYEES	RETIRED	NON- WORKING PEOPLE
East. Germany	1.150	35	28
Bulgaria	4.050	1.250	92
Hungary	2.780	850	75
Poland	4.950	1.400	280
Romania	2.860	1.200	180
Soviet Union	8.600	1.460	530
Czechoslovakia	8.400	1.100	150
Total	32.790 (58,2%)	7.295 (12,9%)	1.335

(Based on the data of the Petition of the Central Committee of Political Refugees of Greece (KEΠΠΕ) to the Speaker of the 1st Revisory Parliament of the Greeks Mr. Papakonstadinou and the Greek parliament members, Athens 10 January 1975).

According to statistical studies, only 10% of the refugees were employed in agriculture, from them 10% turned the new fields they were given by the state, into pasturage (mainly for goats and sheep) while 90% worked in agricultural cooperatives (kolhoz). That is, although the majority of the refugees were farmers in Greece, they were driven mainly to the industrial production of the countries they had settled down.

And they faced, in the beginning, serious difficulties of adjustment into the conditions of their new working status in developing, in the countries of their removal, industrial fields such as the heavy industry, steelwork mines, textile, construction industry... «*Norman*» and «*plans*»

judged their efficiency and productiveness. The Greeks were forced to adjust into the needs and pursuits of the socialist economy and they turned into skilled industrial workers, technicians and scientists (table 7).

Table 7:

Greek political refugees students in the «eastern countries» in 1979.

University students	Students of higher Technical and other similar schools
966	1.440

(Based on the statistical data of the Central Committee of Political Refugees of Greece (KEΠΠΠΕ) in *Forbidden Home Country 30 years*, Budapest 1979, page 15, 18 and 20).

As they were pushed by the communist parties to the path of technical specialization, higher education, science, Technical Vocational schools, and also Universities, in the «*People's countries*» the studios were accepted after being selected and approved by the GCP (table 8).

Table 8:

The University graduates greek political refugees according to their profession on 10/1/1975.

1	All kinds of graduates of Polytechnic School	1.000
2	Civil engineers-Architects	450
3	Chemists	300
4	Agriculturists-Vets	350
5	Doctors-Physicians	430
6	Economists	355
7	Social Studies	450
8	Institutes of Arts	50

Total	3.385
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(Based on the data of the Petition of the Central Committee of Political Refugees of Greece (KEΠΠΕ) to the President of the 1st Revisory Parliament of the Greeks Mr. Papakonstadinou and the Greek parliament members, Athens 10 January 1975).

The result was the overthrow of the «*social synthesis*» of the mostly farmers Greek expatriates, since according to studies in «*hyperoria*» only 10% worked in agriculture, whereas 70% worked in industry. In the heavy and light industry mainly the «*second generation*» while the «*third generation*» of the refugees worked in the heavy industry, the health sector and public services. And among them «*the intellectuals*» emerged, who were the 20% of all the political refugees (table 9).

Table 9:
The synthesis of the working political refugees on 10/1/1975.

COUNTRY	Total employees	Graduates of Higher schools	Graduates of Middle Technical schools	Graduates of Vocational schools	Skilled workers on the place of labor	Others
East. Germany	1.150	121	140	675	214	-
Bulgaria	4.050	450	280	1.240	1.650	430
Hungary	2.780	144	910	890	636	200
Poland	4.950	410	430	1.680	1.970	460
Romania	2.860	380	184	1.100	1.080	116
Soviet Union	8.600	1.300	2.200	2.450	2.050	600
Czechoslovakia	8.400	580	290	3.660	3.720	250
TOTAL	32.790	3.385 (10,3%)	4.434 (13,5%)	11.595 (35,4%)	11.320 (34,5%)	2.056 (6,3%)

(Based on the data of the Petition of the Central Committee of Political Refugees of Greece (KEΠΠΕ) to the President of the 1st Revisory Parliament of the Greeks Mr. Papakonstadinou and the Greek parliament members, Athens 10 January 1975).



On the part of the leadership of the GCP was asked to face the serious problems of teaching the mother tongue and training the young refugees. For this reason the Party functioned greek primary schools in the countries of their settlement. At the same time it was asked to face the illiteracy of the majority of the adults and for this reason it organized the attendance of lessons by them in order to acquire basic knowledge. Moreover, in conformity with the new line of the GCP, the conquest of the «*peaceful front of labor*» was connected, through the necessity of specialization, with education. The conquest of education, the technical-vocational training and science, had to be the new target and give meaning to the lives of the greek refugees.

The leadership of the GCP tried to «*homogenize*» their previous political, cultural or social identities. It developed a newspapers, magazine and other publications network, all dependant on the Party (in every socialistic country the «*refugee community*» published its own newspaper). It scheduled «*party organizations*» (PO) of the refugees in each country, which operated based on a central planning of the central committee of the GCP and functioned according to the standards of the social organization of a «*People's Republic*». For example they organized, in every place wherever the Greek refugees had settled, places to meet each other, «*clubs*», where there were also a library, a study room, a café... They activated defense mechanisms for the refugees to maintain and continue their «*greek identity*». Thus the PO were engaged in the cultural-artistic activity («*the civilizing*») according to the standards and the social organization of the «*People's Republics*». In the context of «*civilizing life*» were cultivated folk dances, songs, traditions, greek customs, with the purpose to maintain and disseminate folk civilization to the new generation and to relieve the pain of the adult refugees. The theatre, the music, the modern greek and foreign songs were also cultivated.

Thus it was developed a vigorous amateur artistic activity, with events which began as artistic shows in various celebrations and anniversaries to end up as «*artistic festivals*» in the meetings of the refugees in each country or from different countries.



In conclusion, the end of the greek civil war meant the «*exodus*» of combatant and non-combatant, communist and non communist from Greece, the creation and organization of the «*refugee land*» of the GCP in the communist countries of central and eastern Europe and for more than thirty years the «*Odyssey*» of thousands of people (table 10).

Table 10:

Recording of the Greek political refugees according to age and gender in July 1975.

Country	Refugees	Men	Women	Children under 16 years	Workers	Retired
Soviet Union	14.087	7.952	6.135	3.663	7.395	1.400
Czechoslovakia	12.013	6.081	5.932	2.873	5.773	1.506
Bulgaria	6.378	3.495	2.883	2.292	2.156	1.730
Romania	5.605	2.700	2.905	905	3.000	1.300
Hungary	4.293	2.292	2.001	877	1.741	626
Poland	7.700	4.200	3.500	1.500	1.442	800
East. Germany	1.493	822	671	150	799	76
Total	51.569	27.542	24.027	12.260	22.306	7.438

(Based on the statistical data of the Union of the political refugees from Greece to Poland, published in the refugee newspaper «*Dimokratis*», 30 July 1975. And in Katerina Chrys. Soultania, *Greek political refugees*, “ella” publications, Larissa 2001, page 36).

During their long stay, the refugees built the «*socialistic society*» away from Greece, and they managed to, through survival strategies, collective and individual-private memory, collective identity and inbreeding to maintain their «*greek identity*», as they always had their eye turned on Greece.

Although the desire to return home was a basic demand, the political expediency imposed slow rhythm, for many decades, to their

repatriation. The greek post-civil war governments didn't allow repatriation apart from limited, controlled and individual cases. The restoration of the greek citizenship and the free without conditions repatriation is connected with the democratization of our national life (table 11).

Table 11:

Recording of the Greek political refugees, according to the country of their temporary stay, until 1975.

Country	Population of the political refugees in 1974	Repatriated political refugees	Refugees who remained in «hyperoria»
Soviet Union	16.200	11.300	4.900
Czechoslovakia	12.300	4.300	8.000
Poland	8.200	3.600	4.600
Romania	6.000	2.200	3.800
Bulgaria	5.650	1.750	3.900
Hungary	4.200	730	3.470
East. Germany	2.100	830	1.270
Total	54.650	24.710	29.940

(Based on the data of the Petition of the Central Committee of Political Refugees of Greece (KEΠΠΕ) to the President of the 1st Revisory Parliament of the Greeks Mr. Papakonstadinou and the Greek parliament members, Athens 10 January 1975).

Thus the legalization of the GCP was a turning point during the political change over since from 1974 the repatriation tended to generalize while only after 1982 the confrontation of the political refugees from the greek state changed completely when the last phase of their repatriation began (table 12).

Table 12:

Up to 1985, the repatriation of the greek political refugees according to time periods.

Repatriation Dates	Number of repatriated families	Number of repatriated persons
1956-1968	2.263	6.786
1969-1974	325	1.086
1975	1.366	5.069
1976	768	2.617
1977	1.049	3.332
1978	1.007	2.957
1979	750	2.034
1980	758	1.867
1981	796	1.735
1982	1.140	2.662
1983	887	2.067
1984	703	1.361
Total	11.812	33.573

(Based on the data of the Ministry of Health, Directorate of Public Perception, Department A, Statistical data of repatriated Greeks, Athens, 14/2/1985).

And on August 1989, forty years after the defeat of the DGA and the ending of the fights, the adventure of the greek political refugees came to an end officially, as a law for the obviation of the consequences of the Civil War passed. The losers vindicated somehow and they found finally their position not only in the greek community but also in the greek history since they were out of the scope of the thematic interest of historians for a long time.

Epilogue

The subject of the Greek fugitives/refugees in the communist countries because of the civil war in Greece, was in many respects a very hot issue.

In the beginning, from the perspective of the international dimension of the greek civil war, it created a climate of tension and suspiciousness between Greece and northern border countries during the difficult post-war period, made difficult the restoration and development of interstate relations between Greece and the «*People's Republics*» which had received the Greek fugitives, stimulated the general cold-war atmosphere and the ideological confrontation of communism-anticommunism in the country.

From the humanitarian point of the view and that of the «*subjects of history*» that is the political refugees, the necessary «*hyperoria*» made longer for them the traumatic and painful results of the civil conflict, as repatriation was forbidden for many years and this led them to submit to ideologies and models of «*political paternalism*» and «*messianism*».

Finally, the Greek political refugees, during their long stay, built the «*socialistic society*» away from Greece and managed, through survival strategies, collective-individual/ private memory, collective identity, inbreeding, to maintain their «*greek identity*» as they always had an eye turned on Greece.

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